Department Store Santa Claus.

Christmas was coming. There was no doubt of it in Tim Blake's mind as he beheld the crowd of shoppers which filled the sidewalks, poured through the entrances and clustered around the windows of the big uptown stores.

"Yes, Christmas is coming," muttered Tim; "but it is going to be a mighty poor Christmas for me unless something turns up."

Poor Tim Blake had good reason for thinking as he did. He was verily a stranger in a strange land, without a home, without work, without even a cent in his pocket. Somewhere in the city were Tim's wife and child, and though he had sought them anxiously they still remained unfound. Tim was a carpenter by trade, and back in the quiet Maine town whence he had come he had owned a humble shop, over which he lived with his wife and little Joey.

A few months before Joey had taken sick. "He won't live through the winter," said old Dr. Gordon, "unless you can get him to a warmer climate."

Tim did the only thing he could do under the circumstances; sold his shop and the cozy little home, and put mother and child aboard the train bound for Los Angeles while he remained to settle affairs. After the doctor's bills had been paid and a tourist ticket purchased for himself Tim found he had only a few dollars left. The business that required his attention delayed him longer than he had expected, and it was not until the early part of December that he arrived in Southern California. He immediately started out to seek his little family, but on inquiring at the address where they had been stopping he found they had gone no one knew whither. Tim had spent his last few dollars in trying to locate them, but without success.

"Guess I'm at the end of my rope," Tim spoke dolefully, as he remembered that he had eaten nothing since the previous noon.

He walked aimlessly down the street through the jostling crowd, until he found himself before a newspaper office on Broadway. Spread out on the bulletin board was a copy of the morning edition, and Tim glanced over its columns to see if there could be any mention of those he sought. Page after page he perused, and was about to turn away with saddened heart when his eye lighted on this advertisement:

Wanted—A short, stout man. Must be good-natured and love children. Apply at 10 o'clock this morning, Manager's office, Burgerham's Department Store.

Tim walked on absorbed in thought. "Queer sort of an ad," he soliloquized. Then he beheld his own reflection in the window of a haberdasher's store, and he took off his hat and scratched his head.

"Well, I'm short and stout," he said aloud to his reflection, "but not very good-natured at present."

Pulling his old silver timepiece from his pocket he found it lacked a few minutes of 10 o'clock. His empty stomach helped him to arrive at a quick decision and he was soon at the big department store inquiring for the manager's office.

Tim was directed to take the elevator to the top floor, and there found he had been preceded by a dozen other men. Some of them were evidently short enough but lacked the required avoirdupois, while others were stout but inclined to tallness. One of the number seemed about the right weight and height, but his face was anything but good-natured. The manager surveyed the waiting men and seemed pleased with Tim's appearance, for he picked him out of the crowd and dismissed the others.

"You'll do," he said, briskly. "Do you think you will make a good Santa Claus?" Tim's face expressed amazement. "I don't believe I understand."

"Oh, it's easy," explained the manager, in a business-like tone. "You see, every year during the Christmas season we have a Santa Claus for the sake of the youngsters. It amuses them and proves quite an attraction. All you have to do is to dress the part and have a pleasant word for the little ones."

Tim's perplexity began to clear away, and when the manager asked if he was ready to accept the responsibility of being Santa Claus he gladly agreed to the proposal. An hour later there was quite a stir in front of Burgerham's big store. A short, stout man with rosy cheeks, flowing white beard and bright costume trimmed with fur appeared among the shoppers.

"Goody, goody!" cried the children, clapping their hands and crowding around him, while fond mothers looked on and smiled indulgently. Tim Blake as Santa Claus was a decided success from the very start.

The manager realized that he had not made a mistake in his selection of a Santa Claus. "He's the best one we ever had," he exclaimed again and again to the members of the firm. "He's a regular genius. Just watch him hugging and kissing those youngsters. When Christmas is over I intend to keep him on the pay-roll. He tells me he's a carpenter by trade, and we have plenty of that kind of work for him to do, and if he remains we will have him for other Christmases," and the manager gleefully rubbed his hands.

The days passed in quick succession and Christmas eve was at hand. The manager sat in his office poring over an accumulation of correspondence. They were the letters to Santa from the children, and it was the manager's custom each Christmas eve to read them over and enjoy many a quiet smile at the childish requests. His mood changed after he picked up one of the notes and made out its contents, for as he glanced it over he read:

DEER SANTY CLAUS: im a littel sick boy up hear in the childerns horspitol an i cant cum to see you becaws i am in bed and cant walk. their are lots of other kids hear just like me an they want you to fetch em some toys fer krismuss but I dont want enny toys if you only bring my daddy. JOEY.

A tear fell on the grimy scrap of paper and the manager was sniffing suspiciously. "Poor little tike," he cried, "I can't find his daddy for him, but if I can make him and the other youngsters happy I am going to do it."

Scribbling a short note, he pressed a button and a boy in uniform appeared at the door. The manager wheeled in his chair. "Give this note to the head of the toy department," he said, "and then send the Santa Claus man to me."

When Tim arrived garbed in his quaint costume he found the manager pacing the floor. "I want you to go to the Children's Hospital," he ordered, "and distribute a lot of toye to the youngsters. You will find my auto and chauffeur at the rear door, and you can start as soon as you get your load."

In a few moments they had left the business section, and after a brisk run drew up before the Children's Hospital. Tim entered heartily into the spirit of the occasion and was at his best. As he passed from bed to bed accompanying each present witn a kind word and a hand-shake the wards echoed with merriment. He had made the round of the institution and had started down the stairs.

A white-capped nurse tapped him gently on the shoulder. "You've missed one poor little fellow," said she, and Tim turned and followed her upstairs to the top floor. Into one of the rear rooms they went, and there Tim beheld a little pale-faced lad lying in bed propped up with pillows. His eyes brightened as he looked up and saw the Santa Claus of his dreams. He stretched out his thin little hands to welcome him. Something seemed to come over Tim Blake. Throwing off his cap and tearing the snowy wig and beard from his face, he threw himself on his knees by the bedside and clasped the sick boy in his arms.

"It's my own Joey," he cried, in a voice choking with emotion; "my own Joey."

The door of the room opened and a sad-eyed woman entered softly. She stopped in bewilderment at the scene before her, but in a moment she was kneeling at Tim's side with her arms around his neck. The nurse tiptoed out of the room, gently closing the door behind her.

* * * * * *

Somewhere out in the night a clock was chiming the hour of 12, and the joy bells were ringing all over the city.

Christmas had come indeed to the Department Store Santa Claus.—[Eugene P. Conway in Donahoe's.

The Cradle of the Lord

Two years before I had spent the Christmas holidays at San Mauricio, in the hospiiable dwelling of the Senora Valeuzuala, a most estimable woman, not poor in the world's goods, as things go in that part of it.

I shall not speak here of, nor is it to the purpose of my story to describe, the festivities of the Christmas season, unique and interesting as they were, savoring of the people and the soil. I shall only allude to one feature which struck me particularly at the time. Besides the open corral, in which the horses browsed at will the whole year round, the Senora was the favored possessor of the only stable in San Mauricio. At one side was a large manger, and this at Chrismas time she was accustomed to fill with fresh, clean straw, in which on the solemn eve a small waxen image of the Infant Jesus was placed by reverent hands.

When I arrived once more at San Mauricio, again craving the Senora's hospitality, I was received with welcome, after my belongings had been placed in the same neat little room I had previously occupied. I then accompanied her to the garden, where she said she had something to show me. There I found two beautiful little boys, apparently about seven years old, making forts on a large pile of sand, which had evidently been placed there for their enjoyment.

"But what charming children!" I exclaimed. "Twins, are they not? And to whom do they belong, Senora?"

"Yes, they are twins," she replied, with a happy smile, "and they belong to me."

"To you!" I replied. "But I thought—"

"Yes, yes," she answered. "You thought the truth—but now no longer. These are mine."

"The children of a relative?" I inquired.

"No, Senorita. It is not known by any one who were their parents. But the mother was good; that is certain. And God sent them to me and Rafael, so we have received them, and so we mean to rear them as our own. Come, Manuelo, and thou, too, Gaspare. Here is a great friend, a lady who wishes to make your acquaintance."

The children at once responded to the request, and in a moment we were all seated together making towers and bastions from the pile of sand.

"Manuelo," said the Senora after a while, "tell to the Senorita how you and Gaspare came to live here and be our children."

The boys looked at each other; Gaspare nestled close to his brother, and Manuelo began:

"We were all alone in the little hut with mamma. We had walked very, very far for days and days and days. Our feet were sore—we had no shoes, and mamma said, 'We will rest here in the empty house till our feet are better, and then we will come to a town, maybe, where I can get some work.'"

"And where is your father?" I inquired.

"Our father is dead, Senorita," said the child. "Where we lived they had virula very bad, and mamma said, 'We will not stay here.'"

"And the people were good," interrupted Gaspare. "They gave us to eat, and put in a bag much bread and fruit for us."

"Yes," continued Manuelo. "On a stick—in the middle we carried that bag, Gasparito and I, at one end he, at the other I, and the bag in the middle. But when we came to the hut we could not walk any more. And when our feet were well those of mamma were too tired. She could not get up. And then she told us beautiful stories while she lay there so sick and pale."

"Yes, beautiful stories of the Infant and the angels and the shepherds, and the wise, holy kings, till we could hear the songs and see the brightly shining star."

"Almost we could hear and see those lovely things," Gaspare corrected Manuelo.

"We did hear what she sang for us, Adeste fideles, Manuelito."

"Yes, yes. That we did hear and will always remember."

"You see, Senorita, she was very good, that poor little mother," whispered the Senora. "No friend to take the children she left behind. Now tell, Manuelo, how you came to take the long, long walk."

"Yes, mamma," said the child thoughtfully, and a little sadly. "I will tell that. One morning mamma said, 'Mis queridos, after today I shall be with you no more.'"

"And you did what your mother asked of you?"

"Yes, Senorita. The next morning when we awoke our mother was dead. We cried a good deal, and first I thought to tell some people in a house on the hill. So we went there, and the man said, 'We will come.' But Gaspare and I went by another way, and we walked and we walked. We were afraid, and had only to eat the dry bread that was left in the bag. It was two days and we came to San Mauricio. There was a big fire on the hill, and I rembered that mamma had said, 'Soon it will be Christmas day. On the night before they make fires on the hills.' And said Gaspare to me, 'They will be good to us, maybe, for the love of the little child Jesus who was born in a stable. Let us knock at some door and ask to eat and sleep.'"

"I was so tired," said Gaspare, looking at me apologetically with his large brown eyes.

"He is smaller than me," continued Manuelo, patting his brother's arm. "But I thought then, maybe better wait till morning. There was a little house near by—dark—I thought a stable. Inside there were no animals. We went in very softly, Gaspare and I, and the moon shone. And there, full of clean straw, was a big manger, and in the middle a beautiful wax baby. And Gaspare said—"

"Yes, I said," cried Gaspare excitedly, "I said there is the manger all ready. We are so tired, Manuelito, let us creep in and sleep beside the Infant Jesus."

"At first I was afraid," rejoined Manuelo," but then I was not, and we crept in and in one minute we were asleep. But before we put the child Jesus between us, to take care of us, and we knew that mamma had prayed right away when she stepped into heaven."

"And there, Senorita," burst forth the Senora, as she cuddled a boy under each arm, "there we found them fast asleep, Rafael and I, when we came at midnight to pray in the stable before the manger. And after that what could we do? Turn away those blessed children sleeping in the very cradle of Our Lord? No; that we could never have done. And we know, Senorita, that the mother went to God at once, for there was the answer to her prayer, pobrecita! And there is, besides, another strange thing. They are called Manuelo and Gaspare—Emmanuel, the Saviour; Gaspare, one of the wise kings. Oh! it was God, the holy Infant. So we must always believe, Rafael and I."

* * * * *

And so thus far it has proven. The twins have grown to be strong, sturdy boys, industrious, cheerful and obedient, idolized by their kind foster-parents and esteemed by all who know them, beloved of man and God.—[Mary E. Mannix in Donahoe's.

IRISH MORALITY

Puts English Society to the Blush, Says a British Scribe.

An English scribe gives a delightful picture of Irish society, in which, she says, there are "no millionaires and no nouveaux riches." Titles there are in plenty, but position counts for nothing unless the persons in question are "good sorts" in themselves. Whereas in England one is tolerated principally for one's wealth, in Scotland for one's birth, in Ireland it would appear one is judged entirely on one's merits.

"The average Irish household differs from the English in being less stiff, more amusing and more hospitable. Possibly the wall paper may be a trifle moldy from damp and the stair carpets not altogether innocent of holes, while your bedroom jug and basin may not match, but these are counterbalanced by priceless old prints, superb bits of old silver, and all 'the fun of the fair.' It is more amusing to pay a round of country visits in Ireland than in England. There is no ceremony, but of hearty, sincere welcome there is no end. There is no anxiety about an Irish party amalgamating, for guests are all drawn into the family circle, whereas an English party does not thaw out until the visit is nearly over and often only shows signs of exhilaration when the hour of departure arrives. It is a mistake," concludes the critic, "for the Saxon to start plans for the improving of Ireland. The Irish standard of morality puts English society to the blush."

There was a young man named Burke,
Who was very well pleased with his wurke;
When he wanted a can
He went to Horstman—
And swallowed it down with a jurke.

A lady who lived at Montauk
Went out with a drummer to wauk,
His moustache was strange,
And when at close range
It somewhat impeded her tauk.